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CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIALISM¹

To the severely objective sociologist there is little to choose between the futilities of socialism and the fatuities of anti-socialism. Neither is convincing. Father Vaughan's destructive argument is of the form: It is capable of proof that tide-mills could not be depended on to run the world's machinery, therefore there is nothing in oceanography; or, science has succeeded neither in creating life nor in abolishing death, therefore biology is an impostor. However valid the major premise in either case, it does not establish the conclusion. Father Vaughan has no trouble in assembling quantities of evidence that among the doctrinaires and agitators of socialism intellectual and moral perversities have been liberally represented. No more difficulty has he in specifying incredibilities in socialism itself, whatever the type. On the other hand, he says much well and truly, but more subtly and sophistically, about the resources of the Catholic church for healing all the real ills in human society. But after all he does not understand, or if he understands he artfully conceals, the gist of the whole matter. Whatever the merits or demerits of socialism, the fight which the Catholic church is making against it is merely the latest action in the immemorial struggle between dogma and life. The antithesis that began to appear between the popes and the reformers, that has become generalized now in the contradiction between authority and experience, between traditionalism and modernism, is merely manifesting itself with peculiar details in the present conflict between church and social discontent.

Father Vaughan's constructive argument is merely: the church knows it all; the church has the rights and wrongs of society all appraised and tabulated; the church has the only remedy for everything in society that is abnormal; therefore, it is wicked to look elsewhere than to the church for social programs. It would be as profitless for Protestants to argue with this position as it would be to thresh out the old straw of theological differences. The Catholic and the Protestant premises are as irreconcilable in the realm of sociology as in theology. Given a deep ground swell of human dissatisfaction, and a fierce demand for knowledge of what is the matter and what the remedy, yet Father Vaughan is unable to conceive the possibility that human conditions may not have been interpreted and programmed once for all by the Catholic church. Whatever their disabilities for other reasons, Protestants, unless they

¹ *Socialism from the Christian Standpoint*. Ten conferences by Father Bernard Vaughan, S.J. Macmillan, 1912. 389 pages.

are merely self-deceived devotees of authority, are not handicapped by any similar *a priori*. We may be as sure as Father Vaughan is that socialism as a program is chimerical, and that socialism as a diagnosis errs, but we may at the same time be as sure as the socialists are that capitalism rests on a social fallacy, and that no convincing formula for the correction of the fallacy is at present in sight.

The essential difference between the Jesuit propagandist and the Protestant professor of church history¹ appears first in the fact that the latter is not obliged to beg the question at the outset, by assuming that the cardinal human institutions, family, state, private property, and the church, are essentially impeccable and unalterable; second, that he thinks he finds the remedy for social ills in Christianity, not as a finished creed but as a vital spirit. Professor Rauschenbusch does not fall into the banality of denying that there is something fundamentally wrong in our social order. Such a passage as the following may indicate the substance of his indictment:

In all the operations of capitalistic industry and commerce, the aim that controls and directs is not the purpose to supply human needs, but to make a profit for those who direct industry. This in itself is an irrational and un-Christian adjustment of the social order, for it sets money up as the prime aim and human life as something secondary, or as a means to secure money. The supremacy of Profit in Capitalism stamps it as a mammonistic organization with which Christianity can never be content. "Profit" commonly contains considerable elements of just reward for able work; it may contain nothing but that; but where it is large and dissociated from hard work, it is traceable to some kind of monopoly, privilege and power—either the power to withhold part of the earnings of the workers by the control of the means of production, or the ability to throw part of the expenses of business on the community or the power to overcharge the public. In so far as profit is derived from these sources, it is tribute collected by power from the helpless, a form of legalized graft, and a contradiction of Christian relations (p. 312).

The author's program is summed up in this paragraph:

Christianizing the social order means bringing it into harmony with the ethical convictions which we identify with Christ. A fairly definite body of moral convictions has taken shape in modern humanity. They express our collective consciences, our working religion. The present social order denies and flouts many of these principles of our ethical life and compels us in practice to outrage our better self. We demand therefore that the moral sense of humanity shall be put in control and shall be allowed to reshape the institutions of social life (p. 125).

¹ *Christianizing the Social Order*. By Walter Rauschenbusch. Macmillan, 1912. 493 pages.

There is no more stirring plea in our literature for renovation of our social system than Professor Rauschenbusch's appeal in this book. It is unequivocal, but after all it is not radical. Its indictment of capitalism proves to be an arraignment of workings, not a demonstration of false principles which foreordain the workings. While the Catholic and the Protestant set out from opposite directions, they virtually fail at the same point. Each reaches his limit in the conclusion, which in the one case was also the assumption, that the source of all existing social ills is not anything essentially defective in our social principles, but defiance of a competent moral guide in applying the principles. The one assumes that Christianity as represented by the Catholic church is a sufficient moral authority. The other assumes that Christianity as represented by a widely diffused moral consensus is a sufficient moral index. The one supposition is as unauthorized as the other. Neither the church nor Christianized conscience can say anything conclusive about Panama tolls, for instance, until knowledge not now possessed by either has illuminated all the relations of cause and effect that would be affected by the possible alternatives. What is true of a casual incident in our social order is incalculably more true of relations fundamental to the order. Neither the church nor Christianized conscience can say anything conclusive about capitalism as a peculiar social régime, until capitalism in all its moral connotations has been analyzed beyond our present insights, and until all its implications have been more completely exposed. There is much more potential mitigation of social ills in Christianized conscience than has yet been realized, but there is not enough to catch up with the accelerated mischief-making of the false principles which are chiefly chargeable with the ills. Practically all modern consciences, no matter to what degree they are Christianized (and by no means all who call themselves socialists are exceptions to the rule), are mortgaged to certain preposterous capitalistic presumptions. These underlying economic presuppositions remaining unrevolutionized, the goodly fellowship of the apostles could not operate our industrial system and make its workings just.

Capitalism is rooted in the superstition that wealth produces wealth, and in the derived illusion that ownership confers upon the owner a just claim to more wealth. Capitalism is accordingly a system in which the title to dividends of some men who do not work, is regarded as equally sacred with the title to wages of other men who do work. We have institutionalized these immoral assumptions in artificial persons—corporations—and we have thus given ungovernable cumulative force

to the injustice which they sanction. This central injustice of capitalism would be comparatively harmless if it were confined to application through natural persons. Incorporating the injustice has not only multiplied its power, but it has so diffused its stultifying effects that most of the thrifty members of society have unwittingly accepted retainers as supporters of the injustice. The illusion and the superstition that are the capitalistic breath of life are often more tenacious in the man with a hundred dollars in the savings bank than in the millionaire. That being the case, a task of economic enlightenment is first in order. Otherwise appeal to Christianized conscience is merely recourse to charity vitiated by ignorance.

For different reasons, both the books referred to should be read by every serious student of the social situation. By contrast they interpret each other. The Catholic writer is zealous for the glory of the church first, and incidentally for the well-being of men. The Protestant author is ardent for the well-being of men first, and secondarily for the church as a means to that end. The contrast will be most impressive if readers invert the order in which the books were named.

ALBION W. SMALL

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BRIEF MENTION

OLD TESTAMENT

OESTERLEY, W. O. E. *The Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, in the Revised Version, with Introduction and Notes.* [The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.] Cambridge: The University Press, 1912. civ+367 pages. 6s.

Here is at last an excellent commentary in English upon Ecclesiasticus. We have been deluged with textual and critical studies upon the book, and the work of interpretation has naturally had to wait till these primary problems were disposed of. But this book was well worth waiting for. A relatively full introduction acquaints the reader with all the available facts regarding title, authorship, date, historical background, history of the book, the language in which it was composed and the translations that were made from it. A large section of the introduction furnishes a clear and objective statement of the teaching of Ecclesiasticus regarding God, sin, future life, idea of wisdom, etc.

The commentary proper is as full as the size of the volume permits. A very large proportion of it is devoted to recording the variant readings afforded by the Hebrew, Syriac, and Latin texts. The explanations are confined to passages that need illumination and are adequate for their purpose. No better handbook for the interpretation of Ecclesiasticus could be furnished to the general public. Dr. Oesterley's scholarship is of a high order and his judgment is well-balanced.